



The Veteran's Voice

Newsletter

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Edition

THE VETERANS VOICE

508 Elm Street Biddeford, Maine 04005

Email: president@vva1044maine.org



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Marines and soldiers discharged for refusing COVID vaccine show limited interest in rejoining

By LOLITA C. BALDOR ASSOCIATED PRESS •

Roughly 650 Marines and Army soldiers who were forced out of the military for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine have so far expressed interest in returning to the force under an executive order from President Donald Trump, officials said this week. The number represents about 8% of the roughly 8,200 troops who had been discharged. The total, officials say, confirms military leaders' early view that many troops have moved on with their lives. They have been allowed to rejoin since 2023, and Trump's offer of providing back pay may be a factor in spurring a bit more interest now.

The Army and Marine Corps have been sending out emails, texts and phone calls to service members discharged for refusing a pandemic-era order to get the vaccine. The Navy and the Air Force are planning to begin their efforts to contact service members, but are waiting for additional guidance. The totals would likely increase once their formal notices go out.

Officials stressed that the numbers are very preliminary because troops have only expressed interest in reenlisting and haven't actually taken steps to formally do so. They will have to go through the enlistment procedure again, pass all required legal and moral standards and physical fitness requirements, and agree to reenlist for at least two years.

Trump has argued that the vaccine mandate wrongly pushed troops out and suggested that many would return. In an executive order signed a week after he took office, Trump said that the mandate cost the military "some of our best people" and he vowed to "rehire every patriot who was fired from the military with ... backpay."

Under Trump's directive, those who were discharged for refusing the vaccine can rejoin and get back pay. Those who voluntarily left to avoid the vaccine also can rejoin, but they must swear that they left the service for that reason and they will not receive back pay.

Two years ago, the military services sent out notices to all troops discharged for refusing the vaccine, advising them they could return to the military. Just 113 reenlisted. As a result of those notices: — Of the 3,748 Marines discharged, 25 opted to re-enlist. — Of the 1,903 Army soldiers discharged, 73 returned. — Of the 1,878 sailors discharged, two returned. — Of the 671 airmen discharged, 13 returned.

In mid-February, the Defense Department told the military services to reach out once again to service members who were forced out or voluntarily left the military because of the COVID-19 vaccine and see if they want to reenlist.

This time it came with the financial incentive. The Marine Corps set up a special team and has sent emails and text messages to those who were discharged. As of Wednesday, spokesman Jim Edwards said 553 Marines have responded. Of those, 455 expressed some interest in reenlisting or had additional questions about the offer, and 98 said they weren't interested.

Col. Dave Butler, Army spokesman, said that more than half of the approximately 1,900 soldiers discharged have been contacted either by phone or email. And of those, about 200 have expressed interest in returning to the service.

"The Army has been working hard to get in contact with all of the folks who were discharged due to COVID since the Executive Order was signed," Butler said. "We're using all mediums, the

contact info we have on record, social media — we even have a hotline someone interested could call.” The Navy and Air Force said they are waiting for more specific guidance on the process. According to officials, the services will compile a list of those interested in reenlisting or getting more information and will have to send them all details on what back pay they could receive and how to move forward. The Pentagon made the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory in August 2021 for all service members, including the National Guard and Reserve. Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said getting the vaccine was critical to maintaining a healthy force prepared to defend the nation. The Pentagon dropped the mandate in January 2023.



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President's Corner

I was sitting here at my computer wondering what I would write about this month when a song came on the radio that I think sums up what we are all about (Brotherhood/Sisterhood).

Was it by chance that this particular song came on the radio at this particular time? I don't know but what I do know is that I could not sum up what we are about any better than this song. I would like to share the lyrics of the song with you.

The song is entitled "LEAN ON ME"
times in our lives
We all have pain, we all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow
Lean on me when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on
Please, swallow your pride
If I have things you need to borrow
For no one can fill those of your needs
That you won't let show
You just call on me, brother, when you need a hand
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem that you'll understand
We all need somebody to lean on
Lean on me when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on
You just call on me, brother, when you need a hand
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem that you'll understand
We all need somebody to lean on
If there is a load
You have to bear that you can't carry
I'm right up the road, I'll share your load
If you just call me
Call me (If you need a friend)

Respectfully
Joseph Armstrong
President

From the Desk
Of
Conrad Letellier
1stst Vice-President

GOP senators eye legislative guardrails as VA prepares mass job cuts

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran, R-Kan., said he is considering possible legislation to ensure that future jobs cuts at VA do not hurt medical care or benefits processing. (Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP) Key Republican lawmakers are working with Veterans Affairs leaders on legislative guardrails to [proposed staffing cuts at the department](#), ensuring those moves are done “in a responsible manner” with minimal impact on patients and beneficiaries.

[Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran](#), R-Kan., said a proposed bill — expected to be unveiled in coming weeks — comes in response to department proposals to cull more than 80,000 jobs within VA in coming months, part of broader efforts by President Donald Trump to [dramatically reduce the size of the federal workforce](#).

“Changes which affect VA policy and personnel must be thoughtful, transparent and carried out in close coordination with this committee and with stakeholders, including veterans and the veterans service organizations,” Moran said at a committee hearing Tuesday.

“I have personally conveyed this message to [\[VA Secretary Doug\] Collins](#). The secretary has committed to me that he will testify before this committee about his plans and how he intends to eliminate waste and inefficiency, and refocus resources to improve delivery of healthcare and benefits to veterans.”

The enhanced oversight by Moran represents a mild rebuke of the department’s handling of the workforce reduction plan thus far. News of the planned staff cuts were made public after a document leak earlier this month, forcing Collins to publicly acknowledge the internal discussions.

In an [interview with Military Times](#) on March 5, Collins insisted the employee cuts will not impact health or benefits delivery but will return the department to 2019 workforce levels, before a concerted hiring push by former President Joe Biden’s administration.

“I’ve been given a mandate, and that is just to run the VA in the way that it’s supposed to be run, putting veterans in our services and putting our health care in the best position it can be,” Collins said.

Membership Corner

By
Conrad Letellier Membership Chairman

Conrad Letellier
Membership Chairman

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Conrad Letellier

The Togus Regional Office is focused on ensuring every Veteran and survivor in Maine is receiving the benefits they have earned. If you are a Veteran or survivor not currently receiving benefits, please contact us at 207-621-6938 or work with one of the five Veterans Service Organizations located on the Togus Campus – American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Maine Veterans' Services, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. If you are a family member, neighbor, friend, coworker or otherwise know a Veteran or survivor who may not be receiving benefits, please help us spread the word.

Dependency

General Information: You may be eligible for additional disability compensation for a qualified spouse, child, and/or parent if you meet both of these requirements.

Both of these must be true: You're eligible for VA disability compensation, and you have a combined disability rating of at least 30%. Adding a dependent may make you eligible to receive a higher compensation payment (also called a benefit rate). There are several ways for you to add or remove a new dependent or update your marital status.

While all methods will achieve the same result, Stop by and talk with your local post service officer about your needs and or concerns.

Conrad Letellier
Service Officer

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1044 Maine

Launches FREE COFFEE FOR VETERANS WEDNESDAYS

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1044 is located at 508 Elm Street Biddeford, Maine (basement of the American Legion Post 26). Our founding principle is "Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another".

Meetings are held on the first Sunday of each month. Meetings start at 1:30 pm (13:30).

To honor and appreciate our veterans, we're offering **FREE COFFEE EVERY WEDNESDAY** to all veterans!

Whether you served in the past or are currently serving, this is our small way of saying thank you for your service and dedication.

WHEN: Every Wednesday from 09:00 – 11:00 hrs.

WHERE: Vietnam Veterans of America
508 Elm Street Biddeford, Maine (Downstairs American Legion Post 26)

WHO: All veterans are welcome

Simply show your military ID or wear something that identifies your service, and your coffee is on us!

Help us spread the word and bring a fellow veteran along for a cup of gratitude. We look forward to serving you!

We offer to the veterans a place to sit and enjoy a cup of fresh coffee and a pastry or donut, read a book or magazine or just talk with fellow veterans. We also have several tables set up with board games such as chess, checkers.

A veteran's service officer will be available to answer any questions on veterans' benefits or to help file a claim for disability thru the VA system. This service is available to spouses of veterans as well.

Also available will be a veterans assistance officer to help those veterans and or families in need of assistance with heating fuel or other issues.

We will add additional days that we will be open as the demand increases

For more information contact our chapter president Joseph Armstrong at (207) 494 – 9287 or visit us at <http://www.vva1044maine.org>

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POW MIA INFORMATION

Conrad Letellier

Remains of dozens of Vietnam War troops brought to Hawaii for forensic ID

An incredibly encouraging article from the good people at the Dayton Daily News.

"The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's forensic lab in Hawaii has begun analyzing dozens of human remains retrieved from Laos and the Philippines in recent weeks. During a remembrance ceremony Wednesday in Vientiane, Laos, the agency received remains that might be those of U.S. personnel lost there during the Vietnam War."

To read the full article, click the link below.

<https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/remains-of-dozens-of-wwii-vietnam-war-troops-brought-to-hawaii-for-forensic-identification/CAIIDUTCEFBQBGTVGKRD5Z33KE/>

Conrad Lettelier

**From The Desk of the Events Coordinator
Jim Davis**



**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING WILL BE SUNDAY 04 May 2025.
MEETING WILL START AT 1:30 PM 13:30 HRS.
THERE WILL BE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING PRIOR TO
OUR REGULAR MEETING. BOD MEETING WILL START AT
12:00 NOON.**

**We will be setting up an informational table at Market Basket in
Biddeford on Friday and Saturday, May 30 and 31. We need some
members to help.**

Membership in VVA is the Right Choice

First I want to say "WELCOME HOME "

The goals of Vietnam Veterans of America are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans. To create a new identity for this generation of veterans and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans.

VVA is a "home of our own" - a community of fellowship with people who share our experiences, needs, and hopes for the future.

Be as active as your time, talents, and interests allow. Or, simply be a proud member of VVA, knowing that your membership helps VVA work for you and your fellow Vietnam veterans.

Membership includes a subscription to our award-winning newspaper, The VVA Veteran, bringing you updates on issues and legislation affecting veterans, as well as unique articles on the people, places, and history of the Vietnam experience.

Membership is open to U.S. armed force veterans who served on active duty (for other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975, OR in any duty location between August 5, 1964 and May 7, 1975.

Our chapter is working very hard to help our brothers and sisters, their families and veterans of today.

We meet once a month at the American Legion Post 26 located at 508 Elm Street Biddeford. Meetings start at 1:30 (13:30)

If you would like further information on joining our chapter please email me your mailing address at **cwomaine@metrocast.net** I will send the information to you.